Spain's *Fiesta Nacional* in a Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

National day holidays are the key moments, ahead of any others, in the dramatic and visual presentation of identification with the past and with a shared project for the future. These dates are also a means of communicating to the world what are considered to be the qualities, essences and strengths of each nation. The political rituals deployed on such occasions help construct the myths that sustain nations. Through them states also appeal to the emotions of their citizens in order to get them to identify with the cultural references, locations and values alluded to in each case. The significance of these events differs from one country to another. Not all have the same status, nor are they staged in the same way, even though in each case they are identified with events and experiences from the respective national stories. For Spaniards, the commemoration of October 12 evokes references to the country's influence in the Americas and nostalgia for empire as a foundational element of the national identity. Since there is no uniform model for such events, and in some instances a lack of consensus around them or tensions between them and other forms of celebration, a comparative approach is an ideal exercise for highlighting the exceptional features of Spain's National Day holiday in an international context over the course of the twentieth century. The following analysis will contrast the Spanish case with those of the United Kingdom, Portugal, Norway, Italy, France, Germany, Ireland, the United States, and Canada **(Total world count manuscript paper: 12319 words)**.

Keywords

National day holidays, national identities, nationalism, October 12.

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On Comparing and Contrasting National Day Holidays

Every civic celebration synthesizes a particular form of communication between the state and civil society, between the governors and the governed. Of all such events a country's national day is the key moment, more than any other, in the dramatization of memory and the stimulation of identification with the past, and with a common project or shared experience. It is a celebration in honor of the nation-state, and also forms part of the process of construction and development of a "state-nation". In these holidays civic, institutional and cultural components are mixed together in a unique manner, which is what distinguishes them from other types of contemporary cultural or religious celebration. In addition, these events inform the world on what are seen as the qualities, essences and strengths of a nation in each context in relation to other countries. On national day holidays the symbols, political rituals and repertoire of images from the past and the present, the elements that make up the myths that sustain the official memories of nations, are put on display in public spaces. They are, above any other, the prime occasions for the public presentation of the foundation myth of the nation. These holidays represent a key element of scaffolding for the study of nationalism.

During these holidays an appeal is made to the emotions of the citizens for them to identify with the cultural references, places and values summoned up for the occasion. The strength of this appeal lies in the repeated nature of the celebration and its meaning, their integration into a national routine, even when this meaning is altered and reformulated for political ends. In effect, the question of how a national day holiday is to be designed and presented, and therefore of how the sense of belonging of individuals to the nation and their relationship with the state is to be orientated, is always considered from the point of view of a particular moment in the present. National days are used by those in power to renew the elements of consensus in their favor and seek fresh legitimacy, even when the institutional messages and bases of support in civil society for these holidays have changed. They are always subject to social approval, reinvention, competition, conflicts, falling into obscurity, or failing through a simple lack of interest. The challenge for these holidays is to represent the national identity, the essence of the nation's being. Hence everything is blended together in their public rituals, their staging, and their presentation by the mass media: the codification of the

collective identity, the authorities and actors who take part, the political concern to move groups and individuals emotionally and refresh their mental geography. Since they have the capacity to shape identity as well as reflect it, depending on the historical context, on such days the political imaginary interacts with culture, the state, social concerns, and regional and international interests.

The majority of these national days were first conceived in the nineteenth century, and most were formalized between 1880 and World War I, at a time when nations were in open competition with each other to secure themselves a place in the world. The significance of these holidays varies in different states. Not all have the same status, and nor are they all presented in the same way, although all of them mark special events and experiences in their countries' histories. In some states the national day is celebrated with great pomp, and civil society is called upon to participate. In others, these days have to compete with other anniversaries and public and cultural events of various kinds. There is no single model, and in some instances there are tensions between sub-state commemorations and the national day.[1] This has been the case, for example, in states of multicultural diversity such as Spain or the United Kingdom.

National day holidays therefore provide special opportunities for the observation of connections between culture, politics and civil society in particular contexts. An analysis of these celebrations invites us to adopt a multidisciplinary approach that combines history, anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, and the study of politics and international relations.[2] Equally, since these are exceptional days that sometimes generate tensions, a comparison and establishment of contrasts between them is an excellent addition for incorporation into the various national case studies.

The initial focus of attention and point of departure for comparative analysis in this study is the National Day of Spain on October 12, the anniversary of Columbus' first landfall in the Bahamas in 1492, and so a commemoration of the Discovery of America. Officially known simply as the *Fiesta Nacional* or National Day since 1987,

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[1] For a general perspective, see David McCrone and Gayle McPherson, eds., *National Days: Constructing and Mobilising National Identity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1–9 and 212–21; and Linda K. Fuller, ed., *National Days/National Ways: Historical, Political and Religious Celebrations around the World* (Conn: Praeger Publishers Westport, 2004).

[2] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994); E. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2002, 1º ed. 1983); Lynette Spillman, *Nation and Commemoration. Creating identities in the Unites States and Australia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and Karim Tilmans, FrankVan Vree and Jay Winter, eds., *Performing the Past. Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

its previous titles had been *Fiesta de la Raza* or "Day of the Race", from 1918–58, and *Día de la Hispanidad* or "Day of the Hispanic Identity", from 1958–87[3]. This date makes reference to Spain's international influence and nostalgia for empire as foundational elements of the national identity, and simultaneously incorporates multiple other cultural and political associations that all play a part in the national narrative, such as the "reconquest" of Spain from the Muslims, the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella, religion, and language. Without sufficient consensus on other landmarks of Spanish history to make their annual commemoration acceptable to all the country's citizens, the Americas and Spain's role in the continent emerged as a unitary reference point for Spanish nationalism. In addition, since the beginning of the twentieth century this celebration of Spain's existence has been enriched with further meanings, and a range of actors and resources have been deployed around them to affirm national, regional, and local identities.[4]

The commemoration of October 12 was placed at the service of the state and various diplomatic offensives in moments of institutional crisis. This is a celebration that, moreover, also contains two more particular components. Firstly, it has a transnational character, since the same date had also been celebrated in many Latin American countries since the years around World War I, which reinforced the idea of an imagined, multinational Hispanic community conceived on the basis of a shared culture and history, and (for Spain) an active foreign policy. Secondly, the October 12 commemorations had also acquired a symbolic significance for Spanish emigrants, especially in Latin America. This meant that the holiday could be both an international instrument of Spanish nationalism, and a symbol of a singular form of pan-Hispanic cosmopolitanism that could periodically be activated among the societies and governments of Latin America.[5] October 12 became a symbol that was ambiguous but still central and largely uncontroversial for Spanish nationalism, and so one that consequently managed to survive political transformations and the challenges of sub-state nationalisms for most of the twentieth century. However, for us to be fully aware

[3] During Spain's transition to democracy the holiday's full official title was changed to *Fiesta Nacional de España y Día de la Hispanidad*, and basic norms were set down for the celebrations on October 12. Real Decreto 3217/1981, November 27; *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 1/1982:3.

[4] Marcela García Sebastiani and David Marcilhacy "Celebrating the nation: 12 October, from 'Day of the Race' to Spanish National Day", *Journal of Contemporary History* 52.3 (2017): 731-763 and Carsten Humlebaek, *Inventing the Nation, Spain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015: 117-136).

[5] Among others, Miguel Rodríguez, *Celebración de "la raza". Una historia comparativa del 12 de octubre* (México: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2004).

of the exceptional nature of the Spanish case in an international context it is necessary to compare and contrast it with the progress of national day holidays in other countries.

Hence, as a first approximation to the contrasts seen in the Spanish commemoration during the twentieth century this study will also examine national day holidays in other locations, and within four particular ambits. Firstly, that of other states around Europe, such as France, Portugal, Ireland, Italy and Germany. Secondly, in a particular comparison with modern nation states that like Spain have an imperial past, such as Portugal or the United Kingdom. Thirdly, in relation to other nation-states characterized by a cultural or national diversity that has been more or less politically defined, such as the United Kingdom and, in part, Canada. Finally, and fourthly, in comparison to other states whose celebrations kindle the nationalism of an emigrant diaspora, such as Ireland and, once again, Portugal. Similarly, reference will also be made to the history of national days in the United States and Norway. The bases of comparison will encompass the moments of creation of these special days as components of the national narrative and commemorations of events associated with the foundation of each state, the manner in which they are staged, the meanings represented in the relevant ceremonies, the social and political actors who sustain them, the competition they have faced from other forms of celebration, and their survival or otherwise over the course of the twentieth century.

National Days for Modern States

Some national days refer to religious figures and patron saints, such as that of the Irish, on St Patrick's Day. The Irish holiday on March 17 has, in addition, a global dimension, since it is shared in by Irish emigrants and their descendants in cities around the world. The first celebrations of St Patrick's Day in Boston took place in the mid-eighteenth century, and subsequently they spread to many other North American cities such as New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Kansas City and many cities in California, and are still very much alive today. In New York, in particular, a very prominent, highly visible parade attended by all the local authorities became a demonstration of the presence of a community with a well-defined cultural identity, organizational capacity, and a level of political and commercial power that distinguished it from other migrant groups. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the spectacular nature of these

celebrations has reaffirmed traditions and politicized the ethnic identity of Irish communities in the diaspora.[6]

If we turn to the sub-state holidays in the United Kingdom, other saints are commemorated: the Scots have St Andrew, the English St George and the Welsh St David. Among the Spanish sub-state holidays, Galicians celebrate the day of Santiago the Apostle (St James the Great, July 25) while in Extremadura and Aragon they prefer female figures and commemorate the Virgin of Guadalupe (September 9) and the Virgin of Pilar (October 12) respectively. In Canada, the national holiday of Quebec is on the day of St John the Baptist, on June 24. In some cases an older religious festival underlies a secular modern holiday. In Greece, for example, March 25 has been celebrated each year since 1838 as national independence day, which was thus made to coincide with the feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary in the Christian calendar.[7] All these patron-saints' days and similar occasions are indications of the weight of religion in the different national identities, and of its interaction with civic rituals. In some cases sub-state holidays relate to traditions from pagan times, such as the marking of the winter or summer solstices.

The majority of national day holidays, however, are secular, and are linked to the processes of construction, consolidation, and transformation of nation states. On these holidays dates are commemorated that are associated with national independence, military conquests or defeats, the foundation of institutions, or constitutional anniversaries. Or, in some instances, the personification of the nation in the form of heroes or monarchs. Most are inventions from the nineteenth century, which have been subjected to successive modifications, even when the date of the commemoration has remained consistent, depending in each case on political, economic, and cultural circumstances. The two secular festivals par excellence are July 4 in the United States and July 14 in France. Each Fourth of July the United States celebrates its independence from Britain, which began on this date in 1776 with a Declaration of Independence, followed by a war of liberation and, a little over a decade later, the establishment of a constitution laying out the rights and obligations of citizens and their representatives.

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[6] Gayle McPherson, Malcom Foley and Aaron McIntosh, "Parading Conspicuous Identity: St. Patrick's Day, New York", in *National Days. Constructing and Mobilising National Identity*, ed. David McCrone and Gayle McPherson (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009): 197-211.

[7] Gabriella Elgenius, *Symbols of Nations and Nationalism: Celebrating Nationhood* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 96–100. On Canada, see Derek Foster, "Canadian Days, Non-Canadian Ways," in *National Days/National Ways: Historical, Political and Religious Celebrations around the World*, ed. Linda K. Fuller (Conn: Praeger Publishers Westport, 2004): 41-58.

Alongside the flag, the date has served as a symbol for reinforcing American identity among all the country's citizens, and as such was especially cultivated each year during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[8]

One of the best-known national day celebrations is that of July 14, when France annually commemorates the rebellion that led to the fall of the Bastille and the end of the *ancien régime*. Over the years the pomp of the official ceremonies has combined with memories of the revolutionary heritage in a manner that effectively makes the event interdependent between the state and its citizens. The day's commemorations were initially constructed as a model of civic education and the dramatic presentation of power. Through successive changes in political regimes, the celebrations were endowed with particular forms of language, codes and rituals to equip them to represent national unity, and in 1880 the date of July 14 was formally chosen as the least problematic of the republican options for a national holiday. In its early years as an official celebration it was not easy to involve the political right in the organization of events for the day. The state, however, imposed its views over and above political differences by involving ordinary citizens in the spectacular rituals it created, and introducing a military parade that silenced right-wing opposition.

Once it had consolidated its political structures, the Third Republic that ruled France from 1875 to 1940 deployed a comprehensive body of educational mythology on the rights and role of its citizens and, as part of this, the symbols needed to forge a secular and patriotic narrative of French national memory: above all the flag, the national anthem and the *Fête Nationale* of July 14. Curiously, after World War I the radical left began to deride the *Fête* as an expression of bourgeois nationalism, but without causing much damage to a symbol that by then had been embraced by the right. After all, the commemoration also served to honor those who had died for the French nation; equally, the left did nothing to challenge the place of the national day during the government of the Popular Front of 1936–8. During World War II the semi-fascist Vichy regime altered the degree of public participation in the event, incorporating a personality cult and ceremonial propaganda typical of authoritarian regimes.

After 1945, July 14 became an icon of liberation from the Nazis, and the continual disputes between left and right over this symbol were finally resolved. Under the Fourth Republic, from 1946 to 1958, the commemoration of Bastille Day reinforced the

[8] John Bodnar, *Remaking America. Public Memory, Commemorations and Patriotism in the 20th Century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982); Spillman, *Nation*.

republican and civic values of national reconciliation. This was so despite the fact that in the years of the Cold War the Communist left sought to draw a distinction in the commemorations between a patriotic aspect and another that was more militant, aligned with the USSR. More recently, however, it has not been easy to bring the nation together around July 14, since generations of the young have felt they were left on the margins of the celebrations. The preparations for the bicentenary of the Revolution in 1989 provided an impetus for the modernization of the *Fête Nationale*, and brought a fresh commitment from the left to ensuring that a revitalized celebration would again be a point of reference for national unity. Today, in the twenty-first century, July 14 remains an icon of the French nation, whole and indivisible. However, while this republican festival may be popular, it still attracts only limited public participation. In general, the messages emitted from the centers of power on these occasions are not sufficiently clear to enable them to connect with a national imaginary beyond political divisions.[9]

In Canada, too, the national day holiday is associated with a foundational moment in the country's history as a nation state. Canada Day is celebrated on July 1. The holiday, officially instituted by the Governor-General in 1879, recalls the fact that it was on this date in 1867 that an act of the British parliament established a confederation of the British colonies in North America, which later became Canada. This did not immediately mean complete independence from the United Kingdom, which for many years retained ultimate authority in certain areas, and the formal concession of all such powers only finally ended with the ratification of Canada's modern constitution in 1982. Flexibility has been a key to the longevity and success of Canada Day up to the present day.

First known as "Dominion Day", it has stood as Canada's national day since the late nineteenth century, even though it has also had to compete with other celebrations, due to the existence of different national communities within the country. One is June 24, which is celebrated in the francophone province of Quebec, incorporating the religious festival of St John the Baptist. Since 1977 it has officially been the national holiday of Quebec, when street decorations, symbols and parades in Montreal and other cities exhibit pride in cultural difference. Equally, since 1996 June 21 has been officially established as "National Aboriginal Day", an occasion for giving special

[9] Rémi Dalisson, *Célébrer la nation, les fêtes nationales en France de 1789 à nos jours* (París: Nouveau Monde éditions, 2009); Olivier Ihl, *La fête républicaine* (París: Gallimard, 1996).

recognition to the indigenous peoples of Canada and, therefore, the diversity of a nation of nations. Other special days have also contributed to molding Canadian identity, such as the “Empire Day” that was celebrated in Ontario each May 23 from 1898 to mark the ways in which British imperialism played a part in forming Canadian nationalism. It was still a working day, so the day’s celebrations were reinforced by activities among schoolchildren. Empire Day lost its luster after World War I, when greater prominence was given to Armistice Day, commemorating those who had died in the conflict. In 1958, by which time it had clearly become an anachronism, Empire Day’s name was changed to “Commonwealth Day”.

The all-Canada holiday of July 1, meanwhile, has had the political role of highlighting the manner in which the country’s institutions and particular symbols of its national identity were constructed through the transformation of Canada from a collection of colonies to a nation-state. The holiday was adapted to varying political and cultural needs over the course of the twentieth century. In effect, from the 1950s, as Canada disconnected itself further from Britain, the expansion of the celebrations throughout the country formed part of projects intended to reinforce Canadian identity. Nevertheless, preparations for the day have not aroused special demonstrations of emotion among Canadians, a feature that in part reflects their own particular sense of nationhood. It is a day with little symbolic force, because patriotic expressions of national unity and sentimentalisms of the kind that mark out cultural differences are avoided. The reinvention of the holiday through the century helped to socialize Canadians in their national identity without any great upset.

The meaning of July 1 generated occasional controversies but no major political debates, not even in 1982, when the government, in the midst of the process that led to the final “repatriation” of the constitution and other measures to strengthen the country’s institutions, decided to change its title from “Dominion Day” to “Canada Day”. Since then, a whole process of national construction has been represented around the holiday, based on the ideas of bilingualism and multiculturalism, not without conflicts, but open to the values the country’s citizens have in common and need to preserve together for the sake of an inclusive society, such as freedom, civility, tolerance, peace, and equity. The day is a demonstration that diversity constitutes the social cement of a nation of nations. Rather than recall historic genealogies or raise hopes for the future, the public spectacles of Canada Day invite people to celebrate the shared, living coexistence of a plural community that is not always harmonious. The

central ceremonies draw people onto the streets in Ottawa, where small flags have been distributed by the government since 1996. In general, however, the holiday is enjoyed in the privacy of homes and other smaller-scale social settings. It is a symptom of an ambiguous sense of national identity, for, despite the fact that the formation of a state is commemorated each year and official messages discreetly inculcate a collective sensibility, at the same time this idea of being Canadian does not inhibit expressions of a notable individualism.[10]

While the content that is commemorated is clearly a fundamental element in national day holidays, so too is the fact that celebrating them becomes a matter of custom, and that they survive over time. Once again the national days of France and the United States are the most illustrative examples, but those of Spain, Portugal and Norway are also indicative. In Norway, for example, the national holiday each May 17 celebrates the fact that a National Assembly agreed a constitution on that date in 1814, even though the country did not become fully independent from Sweden until 1905. Norwegian nationalism grew rapidly among the political and intellectual elites, encouraged by Danish nationalism. The memory of a Norwegian constitution forged a tradition, and became a symbol that would be readily adaptable in the process of national construction and the establishment of dividing lines with Sweden. Advocated by the press and student groups, the Norwegian commemorations were first held semi-officially in 1827, overcoming prohibitions by the Swedish authorities.

The longevity of this commemoration is also the result of its progressive transformation over the last two centuries. In its early years the celebration of May 17 brought together citizens who identified with Norway as an independent nation, and with resistance to Swedish domination. From the mid-nineteenth century, however, the commemorations gained a broader character, especially from 1844, the first year when the day could be celebrated without restrictions, and 1864, when the Norwegian national anthem was first sung in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the Constitution. Similarly, from 1870 a children's parade was added, originally made up only of boys, but later joined by girls as well. Conceived by the same writer who wrote the national anthem, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, this style of presentation was of central importance for the future of the anniversary, because it contributed greatly to creating a sense of

[10] Foster, "Canadian Days" 41-58. Also, Matthew Hayday and Raymond Blake, eds., *Celebrating Canada. Holidays, National Days and the Crafting of Identities* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2016).

community. The day was not always an example of unity, but its durability nevertheless demonstrated the power of Norwegian nationalism to renew itself and negotiate internal conflicts up to the end of the nineteenth century. By that time the commemoration of Constitution Day was caught in the middle in political controversies between liberals, conservatives, and socialists as they each struggled for independence, and disputes over the appropriation of other national symbols such as the flag. Subsequently, however, in contrast to the experience of other European countries, the Norwegian Constitution survived the dissolution of the union with Sweden, and so too did its commemoration. The continuity of the anniversary was an indication that the break had not been very traumatic. In the years between the two world wars, a period of conflicts between social classes, May 17 continued to act as a platform for the negotiation of political and national priorities. While the middle classes took part fully in the events and condemned working-class internationalism, organized labor avoided the official ceremonies as bourgeois, and mounted their own alternative celebrations. During the Nazi occupation May 17 commemorations were prohibited, which enhanced the significance of the event. From the years of the Cold War onwards the national day ceremonies have been oriented towards a celebration of democratic rights, and in some years references have been made to Norway's rejection of membership of the European Union.

In Norway the national day holiday continues to provide a space open to debate, questioning, negotiation, and reinvention. It is a celebration that still today enjoys a high level of public participation by both adults and children, in rituals that involve political messages, the paying of respect at various memorials, traditional dances, and the color and noise of bands and parades. They take place throughout the country, and are also followed in private homes on radio and television. The largest ceremony in Oslo consists of a huge parade of schoolchildren carrying flags and banners from their schools along Karl Johan avenue, a setting of central importance in the development of Norwegian nationalism, with the grandest monumental architecture in the capital, a real symbol of nationalist belief. A key point of the ceremony comes when the royal family salutes all the participants in the procession from the balcony of the royal palace, a notably emotional moment. Constitution Day has, therefore, been a vital symbol of Norwegians' resistance under the old, pre-independence regime, which has also served as a sociological platform for the reaffirmation of national unity throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While the form of the celebrations has changed, the Constitution itself has remained unalterable as a central myth of the Norwegian nation,

which has made the Constitution Day holiday one that has been particularly successful, long-lived and regenerative. Moreover, the date coincides with a festival celebrating spring after a long, cold winter, which suggests that the Norwegians are, above all, practical people.[11]

National day holidays, therefore, can be transformed or reinvented. However, even when they are open to change, they can also be relatively weak, and possess only an unstable role in terms of national identity. This, for example, has been the case in Germany.[12] For political and historical reasons the German national calendar has changed many times in the course of the last hundred years. During the Empire, from 1871 to 1918, Germany's national day was September 2, the date of the victory over France at Sedan that set the country on the road to unification. After World War I patriotism in the face of the French enemy was replaced by the concerns of the Social Democrats who dominated the parliament in the first months of the Weimar Republic. Hence in 1919 May 1 was declared to be a national holiday as well as International Workers' Day. Precisely because of its universal character, the political right and center subsequently erased this date from the calendar, and in 1921 convinced the rest of the political class to observe August 11 as national day, the date of the signing of Germany's new constitution in 1919. This was not achieved without controversy, because conservatives continued to prefer January 18, the anniversary of the declaration of a united German Empire in 1871.[13]

In the Nazi decade things changed once again. In 1933 May 1 was reinstated as a national holiday, even though left-wing labor unions were closed the following day, and in subsequent years the date was redefined as a folkloric celebration. A "Heroes Memorial Day" was subsequently added in March in commemoration of the war dead, and special celebrations were also held on April 2 for Hitler's birthday. After 1945 there

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[11] Gabriella Elgenius, "Successful Nation-Building and Ceremonial Triumph: Constitution Day in Norway", in *National Days. Constructing and Mobilising National Identity* ed. David McCrone and Gayle McPherson (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009): 105-120; Knut Mykland, "Norway's 17th of May. A Historical Date and a Day of National Celebrations", in *National Days/National Ways: Historical, Political and Religious Celebrations around the World* ed. Linda K. Fuller (Conn: Praeger Publishers Westport, 2004): 177-182; Ole K. Grimnes, "Nationalism and Unionism in Nineteenth-Century Norwegian flags", in *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*, eds. Thomas H. Eriksen and Richard Jenkins (London: Routledge, 2007): 146-156.

[12] Michael E. Geisler, "The Calendar Conundrum: National Days as Unstable Signifiers", in *National Days. Constructing and Mobilising National Identity* ed. David McCrone and Gayle McPherson (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009): 10-25; Vera C. Simon, "Reunification Day-Day or German Unity", in *National Days. Constructing and Mobilising National Identity* ed. David McCrone and Gayle McPherson (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009): 151-165.

[13] George L. Mosse, *La nacionalización de las masas* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2005): 159-161.

was no urgent need for a day of national celebration in Germany; however, the Federal Republic in the west re-established May 1 once again, and introduced a new "day of mourning" on a Sunday in November in memory of all those who had died in war. Things changed again in 1953, when on June 17 the workers of East Germany began a strike that developed into a mass revolt against the Communist regime. This uprising was suppressed by Russian tanks, but the government of West Germany made the date the "Day of German Unity", a celebration of unity among Germans.

When unification began in 1990, it initially appeared that the date of the fall of the Berlin Wall, November 9, would be ideal for a national day, since it seemed to have a foundational significance in the same manner as the American July 4 or Bastille Day in France. However, this particular date could not be a symbol of unity, because of Germany's past. In 1923 it had been on November 9 that German democracy had been threatened by the failed Nazi Putsch in Munich, led by Hitler, and from 1929 this was also the date on which the Hitler Youth held its initiation ceremonies. Once National Socialism had taken power, November 9 was celebrated as the day for commemoration of the "heroes" fallen in the Nazi cause, and made an official holiday in 1939. Moreover, it was on the night of November 9–10 in 1938 that Nazi stormtroopers had attacked and burnt synagogues and Jewish businesses in the *Kristallnacht*, the initiation of full-scale persecution of Jews in Germany and, later, the rest of Europe. The date of November 9 thus carried with it a mixture of associations with triumphalism and barbarism that did not augur well for its role as a national day and focus of consensus. Eventually a committee of experts was set up to decide on an ideal date for a national day, and without a parliamentary debate the government of Helmut Kohl declared that from 1990 October 3 would be the new "German Unity Day" and national holiday of a united Germany. This was the date that had been chosen by the provisional government that ruled East Germany from the end of 1989 for its own abolition and integration within the Federal Republic, a foundational moment with a high political content. However, since that time the holiday has been met with indifference by most German citizens and questioned by business leaders, the left, and a large number of intellectuals and historians, who have disputed the real historical significance of the date.[14]

In Italy too the idea of a single national day has been similarly unable to survive the political changes of the twentieth century and competition from other national

[14] Simon, "Reunification Day".

foundation myths. It was the memory of the dead who had sacrificed themselves for the nation in World War I that gave rise to the principal civil ritual of the Italian state. From 1919, November 4 was commemorated in Italy as the end of the conflict. This was the date on which the armistice with the Austro-Hungarian Empire had come into effect in 1918, and also connected with the tradition of liberal monarchism as one of the pillars of the process of Italian national construction, since it was on this same date that Count Camillo di Cavour had become prime minister of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia in 1852. The commemoration of November 4 survived Fascism, albeit redecorated with new rituals that were put on show around the Victor Emmanuel II monument in the renovated Piazza Venezia in Rome. While it remained a national holiday until 1976, after World War II it had to compete as a patriotic commemoration with other events considered foundational in liberal-republican collective memory.

On the one hand, the *Festa della Liberazione* each April 25 commemorates in most cities the defeat of fascism in Italy in 1945[15]. This day carries a powerful political charge, especially in Rome and Milan, since it celebrates the victory of the Italian resistance movement of Communists, Socialists, liberals, Catholics and anarchists over the fascists, with the help of the Allies. Over the years this commemoration has acquired a special symbolic value for the left[16]. On the other there is also the *Festa della Repubblica* on June 2, a national day commemorating the birth of the Italian Republic. Until the 1970s, this was celebrated with a large military parade and other civic rituals in public spaces in the manner of the French *Fête Nationale* or the American Fourth of July. The date is that of the constitutional referendum in 1946, which replaced the monarchy with a republic through the exercise of universal suffrage. Nevertheless, in the first years of the twenty-first century November 4, though no longer a full official holiday, has continued to be marked as Italy's armed forces day, and remains a day for the affirmation of national unity, since it pays homage to all Italians both civilian and military who have died in conflicts since World War I[17].

National Days in Neighboring States that were once Empires

[15] Maurizio Ridolfi, *Le feste nazionali* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003).
[16] For eyewitness historical accounts by participants in the events of April 25, see Carlo Grepi, *25 aprile 1945* (Milan: Editore Laterza, 2018).
[17] Ridolfi, *Le feste nazionali.*

The United Kingdom is a clear case of a weakness or lack of consensus around the institutionalization of a national day. There is no single British national day holiday, because it has not been possible to find a date that is sufficiently representative and at the same time inoffensive to the different national identities and multicultural diversity of civil society around the British Isles. Nor has any date that recalls a glorious imperial past, and which could have served as a formula for uniting the national community, or been a useful tool in diplomacy and foreign policy, survived the historical changes of the twentieth century. In fact, in contrast to other European states, the United Kingdom scarcely employs its public holidays to appeal to a sense of national identity. This has not always been the case, but, nevertheless, albeit that since the 1960s there have been some initiatives aimed at the invention of some sort of "British Day", in response to the nationalist challenges from Scotland and Wales, in general political decisions have given little encouragement to any concern for identifying new symbols that could represent the British as a whole, and compete effectively with the diversity of national identities in the British Isles.

Other existing symbols, such as the monarchy, the national anthem, or the flag, have been less conflictive and appeared more effective in encouraging identification with Britishness. In addition, this situation also encouraged a more genuine representation of the national identity of the English in particular. Hence little use was made of religious or legendary symbolism to extol the virtues of England's patron saint, St George, a figure venerated among the saints of Catholic medieval Europe, and traditionally known for his valor in the face of tyranny in distant lands. For a long time his day, April 23, was also used to celebrate English-speaking culture, since it coincides with what has traditionally believed to be both the birthday and date of the death of Shakespeare. Religious symbols did, however, emerge as the source of dates for celebrating the other distinct national identities among British citizens. Hence the Scots have St Andrew's Day on November 30, the Welsh St David's Day on March 1, and the Irish nationalist-Catholic community in Northern Ireland St Patrick's Day, March 17. These annual occasions for the display of symbols and legends and national self-affirmation, sustained by civil society, have also served to promote political and cultural mobilization at times of institutional weakness.

St Patrick's Day in particular has been a celebration with great political and emotional weight since the eighteenth century, and a symbol of divisions between Catholics and Protestants. In Northern Ireland the latter, however, have not stood aside

from symbolic disputes and cling to their British traditions by celebrating each July 12, "The Twelfth", the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 which saw the defeat of the Catholic King James II and established the supremacy of Protestantism over Catholics in Ireland. Long supported by the state, this anniversary has deepened the differences between the communities, and, with varying degrees of intensity depending on the historical context, both celebrations have encouraged sectarianism and division. Today the symbolism of both these dates remains, although in general things are a little less tense. More radical Irish nationalists in Northern Ireland also commemorate Easter Sunday, in memory of the rising in Dublin in 1916 that began the process through which the future Irish Republic gained its independence from Britain.[18]

The special case of Ireland aside, however, the national calendar of the United Kingdom as a whole was also once marked by a celebration of empire, for over 50 years up to the mid-twentieth century, each May 24, the date of Queen Victoria's birthday. "Empire Day", which originated in the 1890s in Canada – where celebrations were held on the 23rd and 24th – began to be celebrated in Britain itself in the early 1900s, and rapidly caught the imagination of children, young people and adults from different social classes. The day's events had an appeal that stood above political differences and any confrontation between local territorial interests. Empire Day also facilitated a process through which, as in other European nation-states, the monarchy and the empire became decisive factors in the "nationalization" of the general population. This annual event was highly effective in the years leading up to World War I, before becoming the focus of political controversy and then falling into disuse with the end of World War II and the decline of the British Empire. An invented tradition, observed above all in schools, it celebrated the strength and superiority of British imperialism by means of rituals and ceremonies loaded with patriotic content, with parades, flags, and plenty of music and color, as well as special lessons on the extent of the empire. Together, these rituals encouraged feelings of collective belonging, and also aided campaigns to recruit soldiers to serve nation and empire. The indoctrination provided in schools and the array of symbols displayed on Empire Day contributed not only to creating – in Canada, Australia and the other "white Dominions" as well as in Britain – a British imperial

[18] Jacqueline Hill, "National Festivals, the State and the 'Protestant Ascendancy' in Ireland, 1790–1829," *Irish Historical Studies*, XXIV (1984): 30–51; Helen Robinson, "Defenders of the Faith: Twelfth of July Rhetoric in the Later Brookeborough Era, 1954-1962," *Irish Political Studies* 27, 3 (2012): 377–93.

culture regarded as superior to other nations, but also to reinvigorating paternalistic practices based on ancestry, class differences and social subordination[19].

In the interwar years Empire Day continued to promote imperialist fervor, but in Britain it became mired in political controversies and propaganda wars between Conservatives, Liberals, the Labour Party and Communists, which undermined its effectiveness as an instrument both of social cohesion and of the international policies of the empire. While programs for the day were adapted to new invented traditions that arose after World War I, its public rituals aroused mixed responses. The Empire Day parades continued to evoke a vigorous, expansive empire, in contrast to the solemnity associated with the memory of the war dead, and with those who had survived. The experience of the conflict and the growing challenge of nationalism in some of the colonies had made it impossible to sustain the same patriotic fervor and cult of empire in schools and the streets of towns and cities. Political differences and opposition from teachers led to suggestions that it should be renamed "Commonwealth Day" in 1934, though this was not made official until 1958. In any case, the observation of Empire Day declined drastically – to the point of virtually disappearing – after 1939 and especially 1947, with the rapid acceleration of decolonization, and the day became a relic of an international order that no longer existed, although it was still kept up by a few conservative organizations nostalgic for the British Empire.[20]

Nevertheless, while there may not be a consistent national day as such in Britain, and imperial patriotism has fallen away since World War II, the British still recall their sense of belonging to a national community each year, on the second Sunday in November. They have done so since 1919, in memory of their involvement in World War I. Each "Remembrance Sunday" commemorates the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and others who have fallen in defense of the nation, the crown and the interests of the Commonwealth. The day's events therefore do not celebrate the fall of an old regime, the gaining of independence, a victory, or any sort of constitutional accord. Despite this, the act of paying honors to the dead and showing respect for the surviving veterans of the two world wars and other subsequent conflicts has functioned as a focus of unity for the British since the 1920s. This is the unofficial national day of the United Kingdom, which supplanted the celebration of empire as an expression of national cohesion.

[19] On Canada, see Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power. Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto, 1970).
[20] Jim English, "Empire Day in Britain, 1904-1958," *The Historical Journal* 49 (2006): 247–76.

Ceremonies are held at war memorials in every part of the country, but the primary events are in London. Over the years, with occasional additions, a firm ceremonial tradition has been established to represent the glorious dead and the grief of the citizens of a multinational state, a body of ritual that from the beginning has incorporated the monarchy, political institutions, the armed forces, war veterans and civil society. The event attributes a virtue to the sacrifices made by the British people that is stronger than the signification of the other national days in different parts of the islands.

This commemoration is a focus of consensus throughout the United Kingdom, although this is not unconditional, and it can still be subject to a loss of interest or provoke rifts and dissenting voices. With the exception of the Irish nationalist-Catholic communities in Northern Ireland, all the different nations unite in commemorating the Armistice that was signed between the Allies and the German Empire on the morning of November 11 1918; with time, too, the act of remembrance has incorporated British military personnel killed or wounded in subsequent international conflicts, and has notably regained emotional force since 2000 with the acknowledgement of the losses incurred in the controversial interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This is an effective indication of the importance of international conflicts in the processes of construction of nation states. In Britain the first worldwide conflict had unleashed a flood of calls for unity for the sake of the war effort, from authorities and civil society, in opposition to movements for peace and sectorial demands. The origins of the current ceremonies were in the Victory Parade through London in July 1919. On that occasion, in addition to a military parade and other events, and partly inspired by similar ceremonies that had been held in Paris, a minute’s silence was observed in honor of the dead alongside a provisional “Cenotaph” or memorial made of wood in Whitehall, one of the streets most representative of political, civic and religious authority in the city. This monument became a symbol of collective grief; the British government’s decision not to repatriate the war dead to their home countries but instead bury them in cemeteries near where they fell had effectively broken with established patterns of mourning, and this led to an outburst of symbolic actions to commemorate the dead during the war and in the immediate post-war years. By the time of the second anniversary of the Armistice a permanent stone Cenotaph was ready to be unveiled, in a ceremony with an air of religious tradition that included the monarchy, the armed forces, political leaders, the clergy, local authorities and groups from civil society. Ever since then the Cenotaph has been an annual place of ceremony, with a two-minute

silence, buglers playing the "Last Post", and the presentation of wreaths by institutions and veterans' groups, an occasion for collective memory and public commitment to war veterans. Since 1921 the guardians of the commemoration, the Royal British Legion, have sold paper poppies in the preceding weeks to collect funds for war veterans and their families. The day's ceremonies, combining color with moments of solemnity, have also been given greater public prominence by being broadcast on radio and, since the 1940s, television. After 1945 Remembrance Day was moved to the second Sunday in November, rather than always taking place strictly on November 11, but in the 1990s a campaign began, which has gradually gained momentum, for a two-minute silence to be observed at 11am on November 11 itself *in addition* to the ceremonies on the nearest Sunday, even when the eleventh is a working day, as a sign of recognition of the most recent losses by the United Kingdom in military actions.

In the early 2000s, in the absence of a "British Day", the Labour Party governments of the time made an effort to broaden the imagery and prominence of public ceremonies. Some advisers suggested in 2007 that Australia's national day should be taken as a model for a British equivalent that, though instigated by a central government that seemed a little fragile, would celebrate collective civic values and so help integrate new citizens into the nation, and reassert a tradition of volunteering for patriotic causes. Others proposed that June 15 should be a British national holiday on the basis of the belief that this was the date when England's *Magna Carta* was signed in 1215, despite the fact that this document had really been an agreement between the king and his lords, and no such all-"British" document existed for another 500 years, until the Act of Union was approved by the parliaments of England and Scotland in 1707. The date when this latter treaty entered into force was also put forward, May 1, but by 2007 the union was under attack from the autonomous Scottish government.[21] There was even a suggestion from one minister that the Bank Holiday weekend at the end of August would be an appropriate time for a British national day. However, there was no agreement on a single date with sufficient national significance. The only initiative that has taken root is "Armed Forces Day", begun as "Veterans Day" in 2006, a military parade held to honor the armed forces as a whole held in a different city each year at the end of June, which has generally had the effect of reinforcing conservative patriotism.

[21] David McCrone, "Scotland Days: Evolving Nation and Icons", in *National Days. Constructing and Mobilising National Identity* ed. David McCrone and Gayle McPherson (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009): 26-40.

Hence, the Labour attempt to appeal to the symbolism of a special day as a means of uniting the diverse elements in the nation failed. Neither a political nor a cultural location could be found for the establishment of a British national day. Consequently, Remembrance Day reasserted its role as the most suitable day for the reinforcement of a British identity. For, after all, this commemoration combines the leading civilian, religious and military sectors of the nation, and can count on the participation of the most important institutions of the state, the government, the official opposition, and the nationalist parties. In any case, too, there are other things that represent the British to themselves in the place of a national day. The multinational nature of the state has encouraged identification with other symbols as central elements in the foundational narrative of the nation, such as, among others, "God Save the Queen", one of the oldest national anthems in the world – albeit that its potency has been undermined a little lately by its rejection by Scottish and Welsh nationalists – or the Union Jack flag. Or Shakespeare, as a symbol of English-speaking culture, and, in recent years, the pound sterling as an icon against the euro. These symbols have not only survived but are recognizable at national and international level as signifiers of British national identity. Rather than any particular national day, the monarchy is the true national symbol for the British.[22] And in any case the British, traditionally relatively indifferent to questions of national identity, have commonly left aside the commemoration of their imperial past, or diluted it into expressions of pride in the monarchy, and have, at least until recently, tended to give greater prominence to legal standards and norms of behavior as a formula for living together than collective displays of nationalist emotion.[23]

In Portugal, the imperial past has molded the image of its national day, June 10. This is the anniversary of the death in 1580 of Luis Vaz de Camões (sometimes called Camoens in English), the most celebrated poet in the Portuguese language and the author of *Os Lusíadas*, an epic poem on the achievements of Portuguese explorers across the world in the sixteenth century. Among the educated intellectual elites of nineteenth-century Portugal the memory of this figure had prompted bittersweet reflections ever since the 1820s, which led to the inauguration of a large monument to the poet in Lisbon in 1867, at the foot of which the first civic commemoration in his

[22] Michael Skey, "'We wanna show'em who we are': National Events in England", in *National Days. Constructing and Mobilising National Identity* eds. David McCrone and Gayle McPherson (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009): 41-56.
[23] Krishan Kumar, "Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective," *Theory and Society* 29, 1 (2000): 575–608; Elgenius, *Symbols*: 122–31.

honor took place in 1880. At a time of great questioning regarding the decadence and marginal status into which the country had fallen, the evocative legacy left by Camões of the Portuguese as pioneers in transoceanic adventures and the discovery of new worlds was reanimated as a formula for generating national unity. The three-hundredth anniversary of Camões' death was made into a national symbol, with new rituals rich in messages, initiated by republicans and liberal monarchists but encouraged by civil society.

In the midst of the international "race for empire" of the late nineteenth century, in which Portugal was relegated to a secondary role, the commemoration of the date reasserted in the present day the major part the country had played in the age of the great discoveries. The press took charge of idealizing Portugal's colonial exploits in Africa and India. Two particular moments in the ceremony in 1880 served to consecrate the anniversary of the poet and prime symbol of a great and heroic past as an occasion for national celebration. One was the transfer of the remains of Camões and Vasco da Gama, discoverer of the sea route to India, to the Monastery of the *Jerónimos*. The other was a colorful and picturesque civic procession that circulated all through the center of Lisbon before ending with the depositing of a floral wreath at the Camões monument, as a symbol of immortality and a promising future. On the initiative of a liberal deputy the day had been declared a holiday for public employees, which encouraged the involvement of the municipal council and associations of all kinds in the educational and cultural initiatives arranged to coincide with the commemoration, and as finishing touches streets and squares were garlanded with lights, an artillery battery fired a salute and schoolchildren and military units paraded with marching bands. Nevertheless, this commemoration was still not formally included in the already heavily-laden official calendar of the constitutional monarchy in the next few decades.

In 1911, however, following the establishment of a republic the previous year, the commemoration of Camões became part of the civic and epic values of Portuguese republican culture, which had a clear place for the representation of a dialogue between a reinterpreted past and prospects for the future. The Lisbon city authorities adopted June 10 as an official municipal holiday in 1911 to permit the republican celebrations that were already in preparation in the capital. They were joined by several of the authorities of the state, which effectively made this local holiday a national event, and the date a real symbol of Portuguese nationalism. From then on all the leading sectors in the nation and the state apparatus went into action for the occasion, attending

ceremonies at the city hall and the Camões monument, with speeches and tributes from school groups and a wide range of associations. The date became an annual day of celebration in Lisbon, enlivened by initiatives of many different kinds from among civil society. In some years, as in 1913, the commemoration became a showcase for the demands of anarchists and workers' unions, who provoked some incidents and interrupted the conventional parades. In others, as in 1916, it was made use of by the President of the Republic to extol the value of patriotism, with a view to Portugal's imminent entry into World War I. For the rest of the decade public declarations on the date were generally dominated by the war.

In the 1920s, the presentation of the commemorations caught the contagion of the increasingly nationalistic international mood of the time, giving more importance to parades of gymnasts than culture. In 1925 a decree finally established June 10 as a full national holiday. Despite the fact that Portugal's public finances were in ruins, the dictatorship that seized power in 1926 established an elaborate ritual for this and other days of national celebration. From 1927 organization of the more solemn events was entrusted to the *Sociedade Histórica da Independência Nacional*. In the same year the by-then traditional parade of school groups past the Camões monument was joined by a contingent of 400 veterans of the Great War.

In 1929 the new regime revised Portugal's official calendar, and confirmed June 10 as one of its national holidays. However, the dictatorship and subsequent *Estado Novo* or "New State" under António de Oliveira Salazar set out to disconnect the commemoration from liberal and democratic associations and adapt it to its own nationalist, corporatist, Catholic, and imperialist ideology. Hence references to the cultural and liberal origins of the Camões commemoration were limited to settings with a restricted public, while the regime encouraged mass street parades through Lisbon, the inclusion of other symbols of nationalist propaganda, and the presence of the Church, as part of a series of rituals to indicate the regeneration of a once-decadent nation. During the 1930s and 1940s the civil celebrations were embellished with a range of Catholic elements. The date remained in the calendar after further adjustments in 1952, from when it was particularly used to pay tribute to teachers in primary education. In contrast to other days of official ceremonial in Portugal, the day continued to be an occasion with a high degree of political, nationalistic and educational symbolism right up to the "Carnation Revolution" in 1974. During the long years of the Salazar dictatorship the commemoration was popularly known as the *Dia da Raça*, "Day of the Race", making

the Camões anniversary an obvious equivalent of October 12 in Spain under the Franco regime. As such it transmitted a message that portrayed the Portuguese as the holders of a place of distinction among peoples, and the upholders of an ideal characterized by heroic values, self-sacrifice, and Christian abnegation, who thereby had safeguarded western civilization. The day was an integral part of the self-defensive imagery of the regime, exploiting the essential characteristics of Portuguese nationalism.

From 1958 the "Day of Portugal" was made more elaborate once again, with fresh ceremonial elements. The traditional address that the President had made to the nation each New Year was transferred to June 10. Equally, from this time onwards the commemorations were adapted to enable them to contribute better to Portugal's promotion in the world and the maintenance of ideological orthodoxy among Portuguese emigrants abroad. Portuguese embassies around the world also began to celebrate the national day. While tributes to primary school teachers were still prominent in the annual rituals, the general solemnity of the day was softened, with concerts for the young that encouraged a more festive atmosphere. These new ingredients gave fresh strength to the commemoration, internally and externally.

In the 1960s Portugal's colonial wars in Africa significantly changed the nature of the Camões anniversary. From 1963 to the early 1970s it was used as a day for paying respect to the soldiers who had died or distinguished themselves on the three fronts where Portugal was fighting at the same time, in Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique. In the main ceremony, attended by all the principal civil and military authorities, the President gave speeches that sought to promote the idea of the colonial wars as new epic struggles against the enemies of western civilization, bringing the associations between Camões and the empire lauded in the nineteenth century into the present day. This imposing act of homage to the armed forces was complemented after 1966 by a ceremony in the Palace of Belem, the President's official residence, for the presentation of decorations to civilians who had made outstanding contributions to Portugal's cultural and public life.

When democracy was re-established following the military coup of April 1974 "Portugal Day" on June 10 was kept as a public holiday and an occasion for official ceremonies, even though some sectors of society associated it with the fallen regime. Once the colonial conflicts had concluded and the transition to democracy was fully underway, the *Dia de Portugal* regained its identity as a national holiday, and the significance of the date and the author of *Os Lusíadas* were re-evaluated for a modern

context. The day's celebrations were employed by the new authorities as a means of dramatizing the political change that had been brought by the military uprising, with the support of civil society. In addition, June 10 1974 also saw the announcement of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Portugal and the USSR, opening up new possibilities for Portuguese foreign policy. In 1975, in the midst of an economic and social crisis and with the Communist Party a rising force in national politics, Portugal Day was associated with the economic nationalism promoted by the provisional authorities. Citizens were asked to give a day's work without pay on the "holiday" for the sake of the nation, and calls were made to increase productivity in nationalized industries. In the same period, however, with the coming of democracy, an effort had begun to strip the day of its colonial aftertaste and reinterpret the significance of Camões as the national poet.

In 1977 the June 10 holiday was renamed *Dia de Portugal, de Camões e das Comunidades Portuguesas*, in honor of the poet, Portuguese culture and, very expressly, all the communities of Portuguese emigrants living in other parts of the world[24]. Since then the day's ceremonies have been decentralized around the country, with the main ceremony held in a different city each year, and parades of civil associations and some military units – relegated to merely decorative status – to represent the reconciliation of the Portuguese people with progress and the future. Camões has continued to be a symbol of unity among Portugal's citizens, of their national identity and of the global presence of the Portuguese, as manifested in their communities of emigrants around the world. For, ultimately, the life of Camões contained all the ingredients necessary to serve as a symbol of the national diaspora, since after leaving Lisbon he had set out to prosper in North Africa and the Orient.

In 1987, after Mário Soares had become President, the decision was taken to make some additional changes to the meaning and purpose of the June 10 celebrations. A commission appointed by the President took charge of organizing the *Dia de Portugal*, provoking political controversy. The commemoration of Camões was chosen to be the beginning of celebrations of the five-hundredth anniversary of Portugal's maritime discoveries, leading up to the international exhibition in Lisbon in 1998, Expo '98. The overall concept was thus similar to the program developed in Spain around the five-

[24] On the Portuguese national day holiday in the light of the French example, see Fernando di Catroga, "Le commemoriazione nelle feste nazionali portoghesi. Dalla revoluzione liberale allo Stato Nuovo di Salazar (1820-1974)", *Memoria e Ricerca*, 18 (2005): 153-168.

hundredth anniversary of the Discovery of America in 1992. Hence the poet and the Portuguese emigrant communities were set on one side, as, with eyes set on the Atlantic and surrounded by monuments recalling the imperial past, official speakers lauded the exploits of warrior-adventurers and the discoveries of new lands as great scientific and technical achievements.[25]

The Camões' anniversary has thus survived for over a century through all the subsequent changes in political regime and withstood the establishment of democracy, the collapse of the empire and Portugal's integration into first the European Economic Community and then the European Union. The commemorations have adapted to all these political transformations and to Portugal's transition from an empire to a single nation. The figure of Camões appeals to different sensibilities and ideas, all of which are brought into play each year during the commemorations. The poet continues to be one of the symbols par excellence of Portuguese nationalism, for different sectors of society.[26] Today Portugal's national day holiday continues to have considerable cultural content, but is also characterized by the involvement of public institutions, and a strong element of pure enjoyment. On this day the Portuguese people and their institutions take over public space. The many Portuguese communities abroad also celebrate the day, which thus incorporates the diaspora as a key element in Portuguese nationalism. The sense of belonging to a common cultural community is enjoyed in many cities in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, with art exhibitions, sports competitions and folk festivals.

Conclusions

This survey of national day holidays in other contemporary geopolitical contexts helps us to consider Spain's *fiesta nacional* of October 12 and its exceptional nature in global terms, and from a comparative perspective. In Spain the official national day does not commemorate a foundational act in the nation's history such as a war, uprising or revolution, nor a constitution as a point of departure for a liberal state. In fact, the proposals put forward by the Socialist Party, the PSOE, both in opposition and in

[25] "Portugal cambia su fiesta nacional para celebrar el Día de los Descubrimientos," *El País*, June 9, 1987.
[26] Fernando di Catroga, "Ritualizacões da História", in L. Reis Torgal et. al. (eds.), *História da História em Portugal sec. XIX-XX* (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1996): 547–671; Maria Isabel João, "Día de Camoes e de Portugal: breve história de uma celebracão nacional", *Jerónimo Zurita. Revista de Historia* 86 (2011): 19–34. Also, M. I. Joao, *Memória e império, Comemoraçoes em Portugal (1880-1960)* (Lisboa: Fundacao Galouste Gulbenkian, 2002).

government between 1980 and 1985 to make December 6, the anniversary of the referendum that approved Spain's democratic constitution in 1978, a new national day made little headway. October 12 was confirmed by the parliament in 1987 as Spain's national day without much debate, with the support of conservatives, although it did provoke some divisions in socialist ranks. The contrast with France, the United States, Norway, and Canada is clear. Spaniards, without internal reference points that could generate sufficient consensus, looked to an external event as a focus of unity for the national community. As the anniversary of Columbus' landfall the date of October 12 in itself makes the Americas, their discovery and colonization, the key component in a unitary narrative of Spanish nationalism, as well as the basis for providentialist interpretations of the past and, from 1918 to the present, projects for the international promotion of Spain in the Hispanic cultural sphere that have been addressed to varying political audiences, of left and right, and adapted to differing notions of Hispanic cosmopolitanism.

However, the transmission of nostalgia for empire through a national day as one of the symbols of national identity is not exclusive to Spain. Portugal also celebrates its national day with references to its colonial empire. An annual celebration of empire was also a feature of the United Kingdom in the first half of the twentieth century, although there the commemoration of the colonial past has not been able to resist the weight of memory of the dead and injured in later conflicts, and the processes of decolonization that accelerated after World War II. In both Spain and Portugal these festivities allude to history, geography and culture, within and outside the country's home territory. However, while for the Portuguese remembrance of the past is personified in a poet and his work, for Spaniards the associations with the national story are more ambiguous. The contrasts with Portugal (and France) equally reflect the similarities and coincidences that can occur in the process of adjustment of the political meanings and calendar of national holidays, under both dictatorships and democracies.

In Spain the celebration of October 12 has survived all the political changes of the twentieth century, even overcoming the disintegration caused by the Civil War. The longevity of this commemoration is not, however, a feature unique to Spain. Moreover, its full official designation as the country's national day did not come until twelve years after the death of Franco and over ten years after the establishment of democracy. In the other cases we have examined, except Germany and Italy (perhaps because they were established as nation states later than others around them), the respective national day

holidays have also remained in place ever since they were formally adopted, with their associated symbolism and strong political and institutional involvement, even when their specific rituals and meanings have changed. Which leads us to reflect upon chronology.

In the context of World War I and the immediate postwar years, the consolidated liberal states renewed their symbols of national identification and self-affirmation, or sought entirely new ones. The signing of the armistices that brought the war to an end generated new dates to recall the nations' sacrifice in countries that had not previously had national days, such as Italy and the United Kingdom. In Italy the commemoration of the war as a national day would not be able to survive subsequent competition from other national celebrations, but in the United Kingdom the annual remembrance of the dead became established as an event that, while not an official national day, has been able to unite people over and above national differences, and even alleviated the loss of an imperial role. In Spain October 12 was officially adopted as a national holiday as the *Día de la Raza* or "Day of the Race" in 1918, coinciding with the end of World War I, and despite changes in name and presentation it has not ceased to be celebrated ever since. An act of homage to those who had died for the country was incorporated into the liturgy of the day under democracy, as part of the official ceremonies and military parade held in Madrid in the Plaza de la Lealtad and, more recently, the Plaza Colón. This can in part be explained by Spain's not having taken part in global conflicts, and the consequent absence among Spanish civil society of anything like the mobilization required for a world war that changed the whole of twentieth-century history. Another factor was the fact that the dead of only one side in the Spanish Civil War were commemorated separately, in special ceremonies, throughout the Franco regime. Whatever the causes, this lack of an emotive connection with conflict may account for the only limited success of the October 12 commemoration as a part of Spain's "soft strategies" in international diplomacy.

The international dimension of October 12 is perhaps the most singular aspect of Spain's national day. The celebration of St Patrick's Day by Irish emigrant communities provides a suggestive point of comparison and a basis for further reflections. Albeit with notable reservations, because, while the celebration of March 17 outside Ireland is predominantly organized from within civil society, October 12 is also an official holiday in most countries in Latin America, and has been able to call on the support of emigrant associations, corporate bodies, politicians, and official diplomacy. This has

given the commemoration a transnational character that sustains and updates cultural traditions in different modern contexts, and to varying degrees politicizes the idea of a Hispanic identity as a component part of the different national identities. The global, Ibero-American extent of the October 12 celebrations also raises a range of interesting comparisons.

Finally, the idea of the October 12 holiday as a shared symbol of identity for Spaniards has not failed to generate skepticism and tensions. In part this has been due to an excessive association of such symbols with the Francoist past, but it also reflects the low level of civil society participation in the day's events. For some years television has been the main means through which the public are educated about the institutional significance of an event that shaped collective identities throughout the twentieth century. Ordinary citizens generally only hear about the commemorations at second hand, or watch the progress of the bombastic military parade from their living rooms, because they do not ultimately identify with it as a "national day" nor as one of the most durable symbols of Spanish nationalism. Nevertheless, Spain's national day, given its capacity to adapt to change, could still be opened up, without being overtly politicized, to become a representation of national diversity and the fundamental values of plural coexistence in democracy. In this regard the example of Canada is a salutary option for comparison.